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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA HONORS COLLEGE

Yo Hablo el Idioma del Amor

Senior Thesis Project

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Spring 2012

Before you try and change the world, let the world change you.

~Semester at Sea Saying

PREFACE

This work enumerates the tale of a young, middle-class American woman plunged into the heart of the desperately impoverished country of Honduras. The pages of the narrative are adapted from the diary kept throughout my one-month mission trip during the summer of 2011.

Plans for Summer 2011 developed rather unexpectedly. Prior to my itinerary for Honduras, I had planned to travel to Australia for a summer business internship to strengthen my professional background; however, after much debate, the Australian adventure was abandoned in hopes of devoting my time to serving others instead of myself. As a consequence, the unachieved expectations of vacationing with koalas, coupled with my ignorance of the Spanish language, discreetly contributed to my initial bitterness toward life in Honduras.

Upon arrival in Central America, I chronicled the events of each day in a leather-bound journal, the pages of which comprise the body of this narrative. The diary is a complete, unadulterated account of my thoughts, feelings, and experiences while in the abjectly impoverished country. As a consequence of this straightforwardness, I am naturally and frequently embarrassed when reviewing the entries; however, I have resisted the urge to edit the content of my thoughts in any way that deviates from what was actually felt in the moments during which the events were recorded. Only modifications toward sentence structure have occurred in order to allow the thoughts to flow more smoothly and coherently. As a result, the experiences described herein will hopefully allow the reader to empathetically place themselves in the scenes which take place.

With this diary, it is my hope that the reader identifies with the daily struggles of individuals of differing cultural backgrounds in their interactions with one another. For example, as a young American accustomed to relatively luxurious living, I was able to garner an understanding of how an entire society functions without simple pleasures like hot water or washing machines. Through seemingly mundane lessons such as these, the readers can imagine themselves in the daily situations described to experience Honduran culture through my eyes. In doing so, the reader will garner an understanding of the difficulties associated with observing an entire country in abject conditions.

In addition to understanding the cultural discrepancies between America and Honduras, I want the reader to understand the essentiality of communication in interactions with others. Through surmounting a profound and oftentimes dejecting language barrier, I learned to communicate via mechanisms transcendent of the conventional mode of speech; understandings were established based on kind expression, affirming gestures, smiles, and other forms of nonverbal communication. These discoveries led to the title of the narrative, "*Yo Hablo el Idioma del Amor*," which translates, *I Speak the Language of Love*.

Though it is quite obvious from the first journal entry, it should be noted that religious themes are profuse throughout the narrative. Rather than excluding these reflections, the content was shared in order to exemplify the influence of my Catholic heritage on my integration into Honduran culture. The shared, religious background allowed me to identify with my Honduran hosts on a spiritual level, establishing an automatic foundation for forming connections and building friendships; without such a common worldview, these processes would have been less facile. Thus, strong undertones of Catholicism were retained in the diary in order to preserve authenticity in the account of my cross-cultural experience.

In conclusion, the events chronicled in the following pages will allow you to witness cultural barriers established by language, poverty, fear, and crime. More importantly, it is my greatest aspiration that you will gain insight as to the effects of charity, kindness, perseverance, and optimism in overcoming those barriers to bridge the gap between members of seemingly incongruous worldviews. With this work, I hope to convey the beauty of interpersonal interactions and their ability to inspire personal growth.

Life is an opportunity; benefit from it.

Life is beauty; admire it.

Life is a dream; realize it.

Life is a challenge; meet it.

Life is a duty; complete it.

Life is a game; play it.

Life is a promise; fulfill it.

Life is sorrow; overcome it.

Life is a song; sing it.

Life is a struggle; accept it.

Life is a tragedy; confront it.

Life is an adventure; dare it.

Life is luck; make it.

Life is too precious; do not destroy it.

Life is life; fight for it.

~ Mother Teresa